

# Meet Connie and Don Redden



Photos by Heather McManamy of ShortHorse Studios, [www.shorthorsestudios.com](http://www.shorthorsestudios.com), unless otherwise noted.

**I**t's like having kids go off to college," says Connie Redden of the young horses they have raised and sold. She and her husband Don own Richwood Farm in Gratiot, Wisconsin, and find themselves in the enviable position of having several of their offspring out in the world, and in the hands of riders who can and do compete. "All of the offspring we've had are out there doing well."

Like all good parents, Don and Connie don't feel their connection is over just because their babies are grown up. Says Don, "I love watching them being born, grow up, and go out and do well. We follow their riders, their owners, and the competition. When we have an opportunity, we go [watch them compete]." And in between, "the owners keep us updated."

Take Azana (Stiletto x Allegra, Oldenburg/Thoroughbred), for example. "I just heard from her owner," who bought her just last December. They started eventing at Novice level, "and now they're ready to move up to Training, in just six months. She's a promising young rider, and she loved Azana right away. She was saying, 'with Azana I can just get on, do a fifteen-minute warmup, and go right into the dressage arena. It's just so nice.'" And come out with super scores.



"Last weekend she was in first place after dressage with a 22 [the dressage show equivalent would be a 78%]. That's almost unheard-of; I thought it was a misprint."

Don says, "That's the fun of it: to follow them and see them do well. The owners are satisfied, we're satisfied, it makes for a good thing."

## The Perfect Background for Sport Horse Breeders: FBI Agents?

Don and Connie Redden met in Kentucky, where both were agents for the FBI. Connie's area was white-collar crime, where tracking bad guys was done mostly from behind a desk. Don's career involved high-profile criminal cases, and he tells some mind-boggling stories. "One of my most interesting cases was a triple homicide and kidnapping in Pennsylvania. It was made into a book, and then into a movie. They had some Canadian actor playing my part—have you ever tried to teach a Canadian how to talk Kentucky?" He laughs. Then, "Actually, he did a nice job."



# Richwood Farm

QUALITY TRAKEHNER BREEDING



## Richwood Farm Alumni



Shannon Brinkman photo

### Witan

Owned and ridden  
by Heidi Wright  
(except where noted)

- 1st - 2009 Wayne DuPage Horse Trials (Novice),  
ridden by Brad Hall (Low score of event)
- 1st - 2008 Fox River Valley Horse Trials (Beg Novice)
- 3rd - 2008 Silverwood Horse Trials (Beg Novice)
- 1st - 2007 Hidden Hollow Horse Trials (Beg Novice)

Photo by XPress Foto



### Eva

Owned and ridden  
by Cindy Bonamarte

- 1st - 2009 AEC Championship (Novice)
- 2nd - 2009 Silverwood Horse Trials (Novice)
- 2nd - 2009 Maui Jim Horse Trials (Novice)
- 1st - 2009 Fox River Valley Horse Trials (Novice)
- 4th - 2008 American Eventing Championships (Beg Novice)
- 2008 Area IV Horse of the Year



### Eye Envy

Owned and ridden  
by Emily Caccia

- 2009 Trader's Point:
- 1st - Children's Hunter over fences
- Reserve Champion - Children's Hunter

## Currently Offering for Sale



Equipix photo

### Escapayde by Feuertanzer

Gorgeous appeal with beautiful proportions, topline, and elastic movement. This 2004 grey gelding already has an awesome balanced canter and will excel in any discipline. A natural jumper. This charismatic gelding is the complete package, with the potential to go all the way.



### Emiko by Hailo

Bay 2006 filly with beautiful, elevated gaits. Recently started under saddle. Mastering walk, trot, canter in only eight rides. She is very kind, willing, and eager to learn.



### Allegretta by Rudiger

Lovely seven-year-old 17h black bay Abdullah granddaughter. **Sold** readily with great potential to be a jumper, dressage horse. She is really comfortable with a long rhythmical stride and is easy to get round. Fox hunted last fall, showing great boldness and enthusiasm. Don't miss this one!

### Prospects

*Tequila Tiempo* by Hailo  
out of Tashia by Martini  
2007 bay colt with  
eye-catching presence.

*Ehren* by Tigre  
2007 filly turning grey  
with a quiet, gentle personality.

## Connie and Don Redden

Gratiot, Wisconsin (608) 922-6402 or e-mail richwood@mhtc.net

[WWW.RICHWOODFARM.COM](http://WWW.RICHWOODFARM.COM)



*Don and Connie have 80 acres in Gratiot, Wisconsin. They ran the property as a bed and breakfast after they did substantial restoration work on the house. They did a beautiful job, and the Sport Horse MARKETPLACE interview team can attest to their wonderful hospitality!*

While they were in Kentucky, "Connie was leasing a horse, and I got the bug." They transferred to Chicago, and got more serious about horses, in spite of the challenges of living and working in a large metro area. "Connie was taking lessons, and I bought a horse and started taking lessons," originally Western. But, "it just wasn't exciting. You just sit on the horse and trot along." He tried hunters, but found his true love in eventing. "We got turned off with the judging [of hunters]; it seemed so political. We got into the eventing because you either get over the jump or you don't. You could have a \$500 horse or a \$50,000 horse and it's just who gets over the jump. I liked that much better.

"We started competing. The first time out wasn't so good, but we really got the bug for it. We had a good trainer, and we were riding five or six days a week, taking a dressage lesson and a jump lesson. We trained and trained—both of us—for a year. We competed the next year and did well." Connie clarifies: at the first two events "Don got two first places."

Board in the Chicago area was high on three horses, and the commute to the barn every day was long. Don became eligible to retire, and "we decided we were going to get our own place." They had planned to stay in the Chicago area, so Connie could still work at the Bureau, but "we looked for about a year in the Chicago area, and prices just kept pushing us farther and farther out, away from Chicago."



## Finding a Home in Gratiot, Wisconsin

"Then we found this place." Gratiot is over an hour from Madison, and about three hours from Chicago. It has been described as "the boonies," and they are the only sport horse breeder for miles around. Not only that, there were reasons why it was within the budget, or "dirt cheap," as Connie puts it. The house was built in the mid-1800s, and had fallen on hard times. There were people living in the house, but the second floor rooms had become home to critters, including squirrels and bats. Where the back stair should have been was just a hole—from the second floor down to the basement.

They spent over a year and a half on the house, restoring it to more than its original glory, and ran it as a bed-and-breakfast for two years. Every room is delightful, with the windows rebuilt to their tall, 19th-century height to let in plenty of light, and the original hardwood floors restored. Improvements continue every year.

## The Rocky Path to Breeding Sport Horses

But, "we wanted to breed horses." Says Connie, "we started out wanting something flashy, with color. We had two Thoroughbred mares, and we thought we would breed something bigger than a Paint by breeding our mares to a Paint stallion. We got four babies and we got all solids!"

"But then," says Don, "our friend down in the Wadsworth [Illinois]

area had a horse that someone wanted to give away, a Trakehner. We went down and looked at it, and it was a nice-looking horse."

"Her name was Tzarina," continues Connie, "and she had been injured in her stifle, so she could never stay sound to do any work. She was a beautiful bay mare. That was the first experience we had with a Trakehner and we brought her out here and we loved her."

Connie rode Tzarina on the trail, and they tried breeding her to a Paint stallion, but he wasn't tall enough to reach the 16.3-hand mare. Then her previous owner came to visit, and mentioned that her plan had always been to compete her and then to breed



her to Martini. Says Don, "We knew nothing about Trakehners. I thought she was talking about a drink!"

The idea took root. They talked with Jean Brinkman, experienced Trakehner breeder, owner of Valhalla Farm in Florida, and owner of the renowned Trakehner stallion Martini. "She said, 'send me some history on this mare,' so we sent her the papers. She said, 'I don't think you realize what you have.' Tzarina was a Troubadour daughter, and Troubadour went to the Seoul Olympics in dressage. She said, 'she's got really good bloodlines.'

"We became very good friends with Jean Brinkman, and we bred Tzarina to Martini." *Article continues on page 18.*

# Valhalla Farm

Serious About Competition





Photo: © by Shannon Brinkman

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So often in the world of horses, such gifts seem to be only on loan. "It looked like the birth went fine, but at the very end Tzarina prolapsed her rectum. They did surgery but they couldn't repair it. So we lost Tzarina." Not only had they lost their foundation Trakehner, they now had a beautiful filly, Tashia, who was an orphan. "We were just sick. We called Jean, and she said, 'I have a mare who just lost her foal, and we've got a trailer leaving in two days for Minnesota. Would you be interested in leasing her?' We didn't even have to talk for ten minutes before we said yes.

"Tashia and Willow loved each other. The vet came out and rubbed Willow's milk all over Tashia, and within an hour she took our baby. Willow had the most wonderful disposition, and she was so happy to have a baby. They were actually half-sisters, because Willow was a Martini daughter too. They even looked a lot alike; it couldn't have worked out any better."

Don points out, "I had spoken with Jean Brinkman by phone, but she didn't know us from Adam. And she sent us this mare. We were worried about what the cost would be. She said, 'Don't worry about it.'"

"I think she knew we'd fall in love with her!" Connie says. Later, they bought Willow, and "she had two babies for us: Witan and Willaker." Unfortunately, Willaker's birth caused problems, and they lost Willow following surgery.

"We were working in Madison at the time, and we couldn't be with her twenty-four hours, so when she got to where she was three weeks overdue and starting to

show her milk, and we couldn't be there, we took her up to the UW [vet school] to foal. She foaled the next morning; we stopped by to see her on our way to work, and she had just had the baby. The students were all there and they filmed it just to see a normal birth. The next day she was starting to act colicky ..., so they took her into surgery. Willaker was so big he had kicked a hole in her diaphragm on the way out." The surgery was actually completed, but Willow broke her leg coming out of anesthesia and had to be put down immediately. "It was so sad. We just loved her; she was the best mare ever."

"So we had another orphan foal," says Don, but there was no nurse mare. "Grandparents" to the rescue!

"That's when Don's parents were up here for their first summer, and Virginia, Don's mom, was the surrogate! Virginia and Don's dad were down there every day. We would [feed Willaker] in the morning, they would do the middle of the day, we would do the evening and they would do the middle of the night." "So we could get some sleep," adds Don, "since we had to work during the day." Willaker was later socialized with the herd, and grew up into a beautiful geld-



Virginia Redden, Don's mom, and "grandma" to Willaker, the orphan foal.

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ing, now owned by Heidi Wright of Illinois. But, Connie says, "Virginia has come down with us to Heidi's to see him, and he still remembers her voice."

## Developing a Breeding Business

In spite of the setbacks and the heartbreak, the Reddens continued to develop their breeding program. "We just kept on. The horses that we were selling—we just breed a few each year—were doing well." So they acquired two more broodmares, an Oldenburg/Thoroughbred and a Holsteiner cross, and got two more Trakehner mares from Jean Brinkman in Florida. Their goal is to breed for the amateur market, producing rideable horses that also have the quality to excel in both dressage and jumping.

"What we breed for is for people to have a quality horse so that they can get out there and show it if they want to," is the way Don puts it. "My big thing is temperament. I just don't want any unruly horses around here. There are just too many ways to get hurt."

## Why Trakehners?

Their first experience with Tzarina convinced them that the Trakehner breed was the answer to everything they wanted in their breeding program. Says Connie, "we were hooked on Trakehners. The more we learned about the breed, we really liked them. There is a perception out there about Trakehners that is really a false perception. People think that they're hot and they're difficult." They're puzzled about where that reputation comes from, since the breed is respected in Germany and Trakehner stallions are used extensively as improvement sires in European studbooks. "We've found out that they're some of the smartest and most stable mentally of any of the warmbloods."

"Tzarina was so sweet. Once they trust you, you can pretty much do anything with them. They're safe to be around. We've had so many kids out here, and we never have to worry about the horses doing anything mean. We can let everyone out into the pastures with the babies—they're all just very loving. The mares are all so easy to handle, very well-behaved. It's not like we've ever done anything to teach them that; that's just their disposition."

Don adds, "They're also good performers. They can do the upper-level stuff. They're capable of doing it."

Connie finds the Trakehner fits especially well with their favorite discipline. "The horses that we're breeding, because the Trakehner is so adaptable, are very well-suited for eventing, and they're becoming very popular. They've got the movement to do the dressage, yet all of ours have shown that they're brave and eager to get out and do everything. When you have a horse like that and you're going to a jump, you don't have to worry that they're about to put on the brakes and stop. Once you get the trust, they're just very eager to please."



*Don and Connie at home.*

## The American Trakehner Association

As their commitment to the Trakehner breed has solidified, the Reddens have also gotten to know other Trakehner breeders, and have recently also become more involved in the national registry. They have been impressed with breeders like Jean Brinkman, Nancy Cornelison and Marsha Johnson of Rolling Oaks Farm in Elgin, Illinois, and David Beattie of KD Trakehners in Watertown, Wisconsin. "They all love the breed. They're supportive of each other, looking to help you. David, for example, promotes our horses, and we promote his."

"We've started going to the [American Trakehner Association] annual conventions," and Connie is now on the Foundation Board. "We've recently been more active, and we have been able to meet more people in the Association. They're really quality people, professionals."

## Breeding Choices

All the Richwood Farm mares, whether Trakehner or not, have been bred to Trakehner stallions.

Don says, "The big thing for us is temperament, and to improve on the mare," and Connie adds, "We really start with the mare that we have, and what it is that we are looking for. We want to find the best match for the temperament, more than anything. But we have not really been around a Trakehner stallion that was difficult. Every stallion we have been around has been easy to handle."

Don describes their thinking when it comes to stallion choices: "When we decided to do this, years ago, we decided, if we're going to do it, let's do it right—within reason! Some of these stallions are pretty expensive to breed to. But you get what you pay for sometimes, and it's true even in the horse breeding business. Martini was our first choice, and he was very expensive, and it paid off. We breed two to four every year and so we're able to be very selective on the best and the price."

Connie and Don certainly notice all the stallions being promoted, but they prefer to have the stallion's qualifications supported by a more personal connection; they seldom choose a stallion they don't have some direct knowledge of.

*Ayita, by Stiletto, bred by Richwood Farm, owned by Linda Pileggi. "I didn't know I was buying a super-star!" Photo by Captured Moment Photography.*



## Starting the Youngsters

All the horses at Richwood Farm live outside, with heated water and shelter, and the foals grow up outdoors. "The horses stay out 99% of the time; they're just happier outside and I think healthier.

"We let [the foals] just be horses until late in their three-year-old year." Then they are backed and started lightly under saddle, and turned back out until they are four.

The Reddens are specialists in choosing good crosses and raising the babies, but they decided early on that they didn't want to also break and train older horses. "We do everything ourselves except the training," says Connie. Don adds, "If you don't get them started right, you're in big trouble. And we didn't have the time to do it, working full time." So the three-year-olds are sent away to be started, broadening their horizons as well as getting a good start to their working lives. "At this point we're fortunate to have found Silvia [Geyer] at KD Trakehners. Every one she has started has been done perfectly." Connie says, "She's so good. This past fall we took Emiko, who was three; in three weeks she had her going walk/trot/canter both ways. We brought her home, let her have the winter off, and she'll go back to Silvia and go to work next year."

Connie says, "We feel you can't go wrong with any of Jean's stallions." Besides Martini, they have three by Martini's son Stiletto. "We saw him at the [ATA] convention, and we knew right away. Plus we'd seen him eventing at the American Eventing Championships.

"We have had three Stiletto babies. One, Ayita, is now in Arizona, owned by Linda Pileggi and ridden by Barb Crabo. She just turned seven. She started eventing in April last year, and in January went to her first Preliminary event. She has just been a jumping/cross country machine. She's out of the big Oldenburg mare. Linda is so funny, she said, 'I bought this horse and I didn't know I was buying a super-star!'"

Don adds, "Her full sister, Azana, has never refused a cross country jump; not one."

Another stallion was chosen because he shared a trailer with their mares. "David Beattie has four nice stallions. He has a four-year-old imported stallion named Imago that they brought over from Germany that's a black." Both farms were taking horses to the ATA convention, and the young stallion rode with the Richwood Farm horses. "He rode in our trailer with our two mares, and you would have never known that there was a stallion. I thought then, he's the one for Emma this year. He was such a gentleman." He also impressed them at the convention. His trainer, Silvia Geyer, rode him in an individual exhibition. "He did just beautiful dressage work, in this big arena with lights—and he's never been anywhere except the farm. Didn't faze him a bit!"

Other stallion choices have been made at the ATA conventions, since it's a great opportunity to see several stallions in person, and through the ATA stallion service auctions. "We talk to other breeders, and we get out to see some of the other stallions. We know what we are looking for, and what we want to improve [in our mares]."

According to Connie, "We've been pretty fortunate so far, to pick some really good matches."

*Witan, by Donaufurst out of Willow, now eventing with Heidi Wright. Photo by Shannon Brinkman.*



## Marketing the Offspring

Raising babies is hard work; selling them can be even harder. The Reddens' horses have talent for jumping and dressage, and buyers "are from all different disciplines. We've had foxhunter people, hunter/jumper, dressage, and of course the eventers." They concentrate on the horses that have been started under saddle, because "It's really hard to sell the young ones, so we don't really market them until they've been started." The avenues that have worked best for Richwood Farm have been print advertising, word of mouth, and, recently, a little online advertising. In the beginning it was print advertising that got the ball rolling.

Don says it was one magazine that worked for them. "Sport Horse MARKETPLACE is the only place we advertise. It's a great magazine and we always get calls." Connie confirms. "So many people get Sport Horse MARKETPLACE," and Don adds, "We've had calls from New York and all over. You can go bankrupt just advertising and not accomplish anything. We get a lot of calls from people wanting us to advertise, but no, sorry. We know Anna, and that's good enough for us."

Connie took one horse, Allegretta, to a combined test, and was approached in the warm-up by someone who turned out to be a fan, just through seeing her in the Sport Horse MARKETPLACE ad. "She said, 'Is that Gretta? I see her ad all the time—it's really nice to see her out riding!'"

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As their youngsters have gone out into the competition world, many contacts have come from happy buyers. "Heidi [Wright, who owns Willaker and his full brother Witan] is a huge proponent. She will always recommend people come here and look at horses. And she's of the opinion, 'why would anyone want to buy from someone other than a breeder, where you know exactly where the horse has lived and everything about them.'

"Azana's owner called from South Carolina and said, 'Everybody's asking if you have any more horses up there!' Because they like Azana. That is satisfying; it's a reward for us to think we must be doing something right."

The Reddens both feel that having a professional involved with the young horses' training is also helpful in marketing them. It was their trainer who suggested listing their horses on warm-bloodsfor sale.com, for example, and they got a call from that. It's hard at home, with no indoor, to take sales videos of the horses and keep them up-to-date. Connie says that with horses in training, "Silvia will have someone shoot a video of the horse when she rides him, and she's such a beautiful rider." A video can be taken and posted the same day. "Silvia also took Azana out to a couple of little shows, so she got a little bit of seasoning. So when people would come out to look at her, she was jumping full courses by that time. They can really show off their talent."



### The Economy and the Future

Of course, the economy has put a dent in the Reddens' progress. Don says, "We didn't even breed last year, for that reason," but believes things are turning around. Connie feels that, "People are looking more. It's picked up quite a bit." And Don adds, "Our calls increased last year. The young ones are getting a lot of interest. There's enough of a track record out there. People can see the horses doing well and [know that ours] are going to be pretty good prospects."

What does the future hold for Richwood Farm? Don wants to manage the business so that they are comfortable and able to withstand the extraordinary expenses like some of the surprise vet bills they've had, but not grow bigger. "It's a tough business, but we want to manage it—because we like to do it—in a way that won't break the bank." With just three foaling stalls, Connie also feels that breeding up to three a year is the perfect size to stay.

Don, having already retired once, from FBI work, has talked about retiring (again). Says Connie, "I don't really know how that's going to go, because he's not very good at not doing anything!" In his current "retirement," he is not only breeding and raising Trakehner horses, he also recently completed his PhD in Organization and Management with a Specialization in Leadership. His dissertation was on *Ethics Training for Law Enforcement Officers: The Optimum Means of Conveyance*. Dr. Redden's view of their horse business is that, "If we stay at our current level here, we can maintain the quality that we're putting out." His dream? "I'd love to see one of ours get to Rolex. We'd be right down there with it to watch!"

Where does Don see Richwood Farm in five years? "Pretty much where we are now. We just love the horses." That works for Connie. Fifteen years ago, "who would have thought? I've always loved horses, and here I am—horses in the back yard, babies in the spring. I'm living my dream! We've been very fortunate." 🐾



Don also feels that, in marketing youngsters, it helps to have support from the stallion owner doing their own promotion. He says, "We need to do our job in advertising and they need to do their job in advertising too. It benefits both." Connie feels that "there are some breeders who do a better job. Jean Brinkman, historically, has always liked having her horses out competing, which makes a big difference." As Don puts it, "Every horse person in the country knew Martini," and the same was true for her other stallions as well. Connie describes taking a young horse to an in-hand clinic. They were asked to tell a little about him, and mentioned his sire, another Jean Brinkman stallion, Hailo. When the clinician later asked the audience to name his best attribute, the response was: his sire. They all knew and were impressed by Hailo.